

ZYGOTE

The world is full of things that suck, like talking CCTVs and the price of a British passport. Even so, Zygote is rather taken with the idea of talking sweets commanding him to suck harder

HOT WIRED

London has just overtaken New York for the number of public WiFi hot spots. There are now well over seven thousand brain-frying areas in the UK capital, compared to fewer than three thousand hot spots a year ago, and that's one hell of an increase. Unfortunately, there are now hundreds of unsecured hot spots within range of unsecured business networks, so it's open season for pranksters and cyber-crooks to wreak havoc in free-to-use anonymity.

The latest surveys reveal that three in 10 wireless networks in London are configured to their default out-of-the-box settings, and that means they are about as secure as a baby giraffe on a skateboard. This would be amusing were it not for the fact that the idiots who have failed to reset their security codes include financial, legal and medical organisations.

Cynics may say that such idiots deserve to be taken to the cleaners for being so stupid, but ultimately it will be their hapless clients and members of the public who will suffer. In which case, Zygote has a suggestion to make. Out-of-the-box wireless hubs should not have a default setting at all. They should be configured so as to work only when a proper security protocol has been activated and the user has set up their own unlock codes. If a company or an individual then wishes to open their network to

anyone within range, they must do so deliberately and not by accident. Problem solved.

AH SEOULS

There is much debate about our Surveillance Society as talking CCTVs are installed across 20 English regions. If a gang of drug-crazed miscreants is spotted on camera in our city streets, the robot speaker will ask them to kindly deposit their hypodermics and spent cartridges in the nearest recycling bin. Nothing so passive in South Korea, where talking CCTVs have gone mobile.

Fifteen-year-old students at schools in Seoul are being protected from 'immorality' by a cybernetic guardian called DU-Robo-Ofro, which doesn't just hang about waiting for trouble to happen – it goes out to hunt for it. Moving at a steady pace of five kilometres an hour, the Robopod is equipped with cameras and a microphone as it patrols its beat using GPS. There is a manual override to step in and "alert officials when it detects someone trying to seduce a student," according to project executive Kang Jung-won. "Then teachers send a warning to the perpetrator through a loudspeaker." If any 15-year-olds are spotted having sex in the corridors, the Korean instruction for "put that thing away!" blares out instantly. Then it takes about 60 seconds for a

teacher to arrive on the scene and throw a bucket of cold water over the steaming copulators.

Ah, brave new world. Most people of Zygote's vintage can barely remember sex lasting for as long as 60 seconds.

TAX E-VASION

Two years ago, the cost of a UK passport was £42. Today, it is an eye-watering £89. And it is the government's intention to increase the price to at least £119 when ID cards are introduced. The pathetic excuse for such extortion is "in order to cover the increased costs of biometric data". Really?

The equivalent cost for a passport for our nearest neighbours in the Republic of Ireland or in Belgium is about 50 quid. These are small countries, so by economy of scale our costs should be lower, not higher. Americans pay just under 50 quid, and their regime is even more paranoid than ours when it comes to a misplaced faith in computerised biometrics. But at least the Yanks have the honesty to admit that their costs include 30 per cent for administration costs and another 15 per cent for something with the bizarre name of Security Tax. The French and Germans pay around £40 for their passports, and nobody can deny their borders are more vulnerable than ours. So what is going on?

At the last count, Zygote discovered that the Irish, Belgians,

Americans, French and even the Germans have the same number of retinas and fingerprints as citizens of the United Kingdom. If they were one-armed Cyclops, their half-price costs would make sense, but as it is we are being ripped off by an undeclared Identity Tax. Rebel!

BOG STANDARD

Researchers from the University of Central Sweden have developed talking paper, using layers of conductive ink sprayed on to cellular printed speaker diaphragms. Imagine the applications! Well, project leader Mikael Gulliksson has imagined the implications, but his imagination is a bit limited. He suggests audio warnings on packets of fags, but the problem is the paper talks only when you crumple it, and this normally happens when the fag packet is empty and the damage is already done.

Zygote has some more practical suggestions. You are rummaging in a packet of Werthers Original toffees when it whispers in a husky voice, "Suck me baby, until I'm all hot and sticky". Hmm, perhaps that could be open to misinterpretation. OK, how about this: you find a dull brown envelope on the doormat, and as you rip it open a Dalek screams, "Pay your gas bill immediately, or you will be exterminated!" No, that would be intimidating for people of a nervous disposition.

Of course! The killer application is even more obvious. What paper do you use every day that is guaranteed to crumple before disposal? Talking toilet paper! Each sheet bears the face of the late Bernard Manning, and as you crumple the paper he begins to tell one of his 'jokes'. But before he can deliver the punchline, you have wiped your bumhole clean and flushed him down the pan. Who would not pay good money for that? ☞

Great Moments in Computing
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236: PREDICTIVE TEXT



Predictive text for instant messaging was first integrated into personal communication devices by Motorola in 1998



These days, predictive text is second nature to most sectors or urban youth...



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